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AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

VOLUME 6 SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA, DECEMBER, 1924 NUMBER 12

DECEMBER MEETING: The next regular meeting of the Association will be held on Thursday evening, 11th inst., at eight o'clock, in the Assembly Hall of the Public Library, corner of McAllister and Larkin Sts. Take elevator to third floor. Car lines No. 5 or No. 19.

The feature of the evening will be the first connected and complete account that has been given of the visitors entertained by our Vice-President, Mrs. G. Earle Kelly, in her home garden in Alameda, during the past six years and many of our members will be surprised to learn of the "Possibilities of Birding in a Small Garden." Visitors will be made welcome at the meeting.

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DECEMBER FIELD TRIP will be taken on Sunday, December 14th, to Golden Gate Park. Take McAllister car No. 5, "Beach" sign, to 43d Avenue entrance on Fulton St. Bring lunch.

The usual route will be followed, skirting Chain Lakes, and passing Stadium, Spreckels, Lloyd and Stow Lakes, ending at Japanese tea garden, where lunch will be eaten if it has survived to this point. The lecture of the day at the Academy of Sciences, at three o'clock, will be given by Mr. J. M. Gwinn, Superintendent of San Francisco Public Schools. Subject: "The Place of the Public Schools in the Program of San Francisco."

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE NOVEMBER MEETING: The ninety-fourth regular meeting of the Association was held on November 13th, in the Assembly Hall of the San Francisco Public Library, with President Kibbe in the chair; Mrs. Carl R. Smith, Secretary; eleven members and one guest in attendance.

There being no business to transact, Past Honorary President Joseph Dixon proceeded at once with his review of the present status and "Probable Fate of the Sage Hen in California."

This bird is restricted principally to the sage plains and formerly ranged from British Columbia to a short distance south of Mono lake, reaching eastward to the Black Hills country, but it is now very much reduced and, without some effective sort of protective measures, would seem to be on the way to extinction. It is the largest of the upland game birds of the country, withal very variable in size, the males ranging from twenty four to thirty three inches in length, and occasionally attaining a weight of eight pounds, and the females a length of twenty one inches and a weight of five pounds. Their range in California extends from the southerly end of Mono lake, up the backbone of the Sierra to Lassen county, westward to Mt. Lassen and up into Modoc county.

The hen's clutch consists of seven to nine eggs and the cock apparently leaves the entire responsibility of raising the young to the mother. In the early summer the birds subsist upon insects, taking to grass and other vegetation later and in September they eat the sage brush leaves and live on these until the insects return the following year. In the stomach of one bird were found between 1500 and 2000 sage leaves. They prefer the shorter growths of brush, possibly on account of greater safety. They have a finely sustained soaring flight, flying low for a distance of one half or as much as a whole mile before alighting again, after being alarmed. On the other hand, they seem liable at times to become confused and may be killed with a stick and when their feathers are wet, they have difficulty in attaining flight in time to save themselves.

The speaker found limited areas in the northern part of the state where these birds seem to be holding their own. Flocks of twenty to over fifty were counted, but in general it is certain that their numbers are not only greatly reduced, but are steadily decreasing. A sheepherder of ten years experience in one area stated his conviction that the decrease is due to hunters. Ten years ago local people would come from limited distances in wagons and do some shooting, but with the inordinate development of the automobile, the radius of travel has enormously increased and now large numbers of sportsmen come from San Francisco or further, and it is Bang! Bang! as long as a bird can be found to shoot at. On the other hand, a hunter of several years experience stated that it has been increasingly difficult to get the four-a-day or eight-a-week limit, because of the sheep and their herders tramping out the nests of the birds. Probably both of these conditions are operating to the damage of the birds, but, whatever the causes, ten years more destruction at the present rate will eliminate them from the list of California game birds.

The suggestion has been made that the birds should be domesticated, but the difficulty in this plan lies with the question of feeding. Mr. Dixon had one bird in camp whose wing had been slightly injured and every effort was made to keep it alive, but it ate very little and lived for no more than a week. The large ranch upon which camp was made, was in a sense a sort of refuge, but there were some 26,000 sheep grazing over it and the birds could not be expected to prosper under such circumstances.

Nevada has an antelope refuge abutting on the California line in this vicinity and the sage hens could share their range in comfort. If California should establish a refuge say twenty by thirty miles in extent, adjacent to the antelope refuge, it would be admirable for the birds as well. The most practicable relief, however, seems to lie in a closed season for such time as is found necessary for the birds to re-establish themselves and we shall have to come to this if we wish to retain this admirable game fowl.

A general discussion followed the lecture, during which reference was made to the lamentable over-grazing of our National Forest areas and the effect thereof upon a long list of our game birds and mammals, and the meeting adjourned with expressions of appreciation of the interesting treatment of the subject of the lecture.

CRANES

On March 29, 1918, near Chowchilla, at 12:30 p. m., high in the air, I saw what I was positive was a flock of about fifty sandhill cranes and at that time there was no doubt in my mind, as in years ago I had killed a goodly number of these birds on the prairies of what was then the Territory of Dakota. The sandhill, and occasionally a whooping, crane were a welcome addition to the family larder and in fortunate years we secured enough of them to enable us to salt down a barrelful. I considered myself perfectly familiar with the bird and intended to tell my bird friends what I had seen.

About the time that sandhill cranes were uppermost in my mind, a copy of the "Game Birds of California" reached me and, after reading the chapters on cranes, I decided to say nothing as I was in doubt whether these were Little Brown or Sandhill Cranes.

At Lake Almanor, July 30th, 1923, about 4:30 a. m., I was awakened by the call of a crane. I sat up, wide awake in an instant, and saw flying overhead four cranes, sandhill in all respects and giving the old familiar notes.

They passed over again the same night at 8:37, when it was too dark to see them. Our camp was evidently in a flight line to a feeding ground and I made my plans accordingly. At 9:10 a. m. the following day, I flushed four cranes apparently out of a tree near a small mud flat. It was possible that they came from the ground as they were compelled to rise over the tree tops or else to fly over the lake, and in no instance did I see them over the water. I was within 300 yards and judged these birds to be "sandhill cranes," in fact all doubts were removed from my mind.

The feeding ground was a small mud flat on the shore of the lake, where they plowed up the mud in furrows from 30 to 36 inches long, but I did not succeed in finding the attraction. They also fed farther down the lake, on a point which was well populated with frogs. Tracks in the mud measured seven and a quarter inches and there was practically no variation in size or coloration of the birds, so I adjudged them all to be adults. Quoting the "Game Birds of California," this crane nests from southern British Columbia south to the California line and should not have been in the vicinity of Lake Almanor at this season. The "Condor," vol. xxvi, number 6, Joseph Maillard makes mention of the nesting of the Sandhill Crane at Middle Lake near Eagleville. Under date of May 27, he found an abandoned nest and sighted a half grown crane walking with its parents in a nearby field at dusk. It is evident that the Sandhill Crane is nesting in small numbers in the Alpine lake region of Modoc county.

Carl R. Smith.

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A FEAT IN MEMORY AND MIMICRY

The November *Bulletin of the Massachusetts Audubon Society* quotes the following extract from the *Roxbury Tribune* of that state:

Recalling after fifty-seven years the song of a then unidentified bird and whistling it note by note to a piano with such fidelity that the bird was identified, is the unusual feat recently of Dr. John Warren Achorn, President of the Sandhills Bird Club, Pine Bluff, N. C. The Doctor said afterward that his pucker string for whistling was not as good as it used to be when he was a boy and he had quite a tussle of it at times getting the right note. He told the story to a reporter for the *Tribune*.

"When I was a boy I used to drive cows to pasture in the morning and go for them at night, in Newcastle, Me. The pasture bars looked into the west, and about a quarter of a mile from the pasture entrance, on a rise of land, stood three great pine trees, tall enough for masts for ships that sail the world around. In these pine-tops I used to hear a bird sing, its clear notes coming to me very distinctly as I stood by the pasture bars, although the pines were a quarter of a mile away. I asked my father what that bird was I heard singing in the pine-tops at sunset, and he said it was a wood lark. My father was something of a naturalist, but the name he gave me undoubtedly was a local one.

"All of my life I have looked for that name, wood lark, in various bird books, but never have been able to find it. About five years ago I sat down by the piano and had my wife take down, as I whistled it, what that bird singing in the pine-tops had said to me fifty-seven years before. I then sent

the score as written out by Mrs. Achorn to C. J. Maynard of West Newton, the oldest ornithologist, perhaps, in this country, and asked him if he would interpret the song for me. His answer came back promptly. It was the hermit thrush I had heard. I thought I had done well to remember for fifty-seven years the Jenny Lind song of that bird.

"Once I stalked the bird, creeping out under the pine trees, close to which ran a stone wall. Looking up into the tops of the trees, I saw a bird, eight or nine inches long, hop up among the branches, and that undoubtedly was my hermit thrush, but I could not believe it at the time, for the sound came over to me so clearly standing by the pasture bars that I felt I must see a bird as large as an owl."

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NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP was taken on Sunday, the 16th, to Lake Lagunitas, via Ross and Phoenix Lake. The day was beautiful, clear and sunny, but comfortably cool.

The notable features of the trip were the ring-necked ducks at Phoenix Lake; the white-throated sparrow and a red-breasted sapsucker at Ross. This is the first occasion in seven years' birding that the Association has recorded this sapsucker in this vicinity.

Lunch was eaten at the picnic grounds below the Lagunitas dam and a goodly portion of the party enjoyed the circuit of the lake along the shore trail. For some reason no Townsend warblers were observed on this occasion, but a dusky warbler substituted for him. Return to Ross was made in time to catch the 4:35 p. m. train for San Francisco. Everyone was on the lookout for the creepers, going and coming through Ross, but they did not appear.

Birds encountered on the Bay were: Glaucous-winged, western, California and ring-billed gulls, Forster tern, Brandt cormorant and surf scoter. On land and lakes: Canvas-back, scaup, ring-necked and ruddy ducks; coot, a flock of thirty or forty band-tailed pigeons, Harris woodpecker, red-breasted sapsucker, California woodpecker and red-shafted flicker; black phoebe, coast and California jays, crow and purple finch; white-throated and golden-crowned sparrows, junco and song sparrow; San Francisco and California towhees, Hutton vireo, dusky and Audubon warblers, Vigors and winter wrens; plain titmouse, chickadee, bush and wren tits and ruby crowned kinglet flaunting his torch; hermit thrush, robin, varied thrush and western bluebird. Forty-two species.

Members in attendance: Mesdemoiselles Ayer, Pettit and Schroder; Mesdames Mexia and Witt; Messrs. Grueningen, Kibbe and Myers; Ananda and Eric Jacobs. As guests, Misses Allison Thompson and Sylvia Bastian; Henry Levy, Lawrence Mendelsohn of Scout Troop 17, and Felix Jacobs. Ten members and five guests.

AUDUBON ASSOCIATION OF THE PACIFIC

FOR THE STUDY AND THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS

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Meets second Thursday of each month, at 8:00 p.m., in Assembly Hall of San Francisco Public Library, Larkin and McAllister Streets.

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